Major Mallaw with kind regards

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LA BOURDONNAIS:

A LECTURE

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THE DALHOUSIE INSTITUTE,

The 13th November 1865.

BY

MAJOR G. B. MALLESON,

BENGAL STAFF CORPS.

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"The worth of a State, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it; and a State which postpones the interests of *their* mental expansion and elevation, to a little more of administrative skill, or of that semblance of it which practice gives, in the details of business; a State which dwarfs its men, in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands, even for beneficial purposes, will find that with small men no great thing was ever really accomplished; and that the perfection of machinery to which it has sacrificed every thing, will in the end avail it nothing, for want of the vital powers which, in order that the machine might work more smoothly, it has preferred to banish."

JOHN STUART MILL, ON LIBERTY.

2257

The view supported in this Lecture, on the merits of the quarrel between La Bourdonnais and Dupleix, differs very considerably from that promulgated by Mr. Orme, Mr. Mill, and their numerous copyists. But it is a fact that while Mr. Orme's history is based on the traditions then prevalent at Madras, which were naturally favourable to La Bourdonnais, and Mr. Mill's, avowedly, on La Bourdonnais' own memoirs, the statements in this Lecture have for their sole foundation the official correspondence of the period, copies of which are in the possession of the writer.

The short limits allotted to a Lecture would not permit him to quote, at the length that would alone be convincing, the correspondence bearing on the subject; but it is his intention to publish so much of it as may be necessary to carry conviction to unprejudiced minds, in the form of notes to an article on the first struggle in the Carnatic, which will appear in the February number of the 'Calcutta Review.'

M.

ALIPORE,
16*th November* 1865.

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LA BOURDONNAIS.

In the first lecture I had the honour of delivering in this Institute,—a lecture on the career of Count Lally,—I alluded incidentally to the active part which had been taken in the affairs of French India by M. de la Bourdonnais. I then spoke of him as a self-made man, as one of the noblest characters that ever lived, and as one whose career merited on every account a separate notice.

I confess that having before me then only the accounts of the adventures of that justly celebrated man written by Mr. Orme, Mr. Mill, and those who have been at once their successors and copyists, I could scarcely resist the conclusion that La Bourdonnais was a perfect character. As such, at least, they have painted him, and the mere reader of Indian history, having no higher authorities to refer to, never thinks of questioning their verdict.

And yet it is a fact that there exist in the present day public documents which neither Mr. Orme nor Mr. Mill ever consulted, but the contents of which give a very different aspect to certain portions of the career of La Bourdonnais. These are the papers of the family of Dupleix, giving the official letters which were written and received immediately preceding, and during, the time of the siege of Madras; and, in addition, a valuable collection of documents referring to French possessions in India, bequeathed to the Asiatic So-

and enterprise of his young Captain, the Commodore, by a slight alteration of the letters which went to form the name of the captured town, transformed it from the Indian Maihi or Mahi into the French Mahé—the first name of La Bourdonnais. This new name not only took root, but it gradually effaced the recollection that the town had ever borne another.

Reduced by the peace, to which France at this period seemed disposed, to inactivity, La Bourdonnais, after the departure of the squadron from Mahé, fitted out a ship on his own account, and traded for three or four years in the Arabian seas. The ascendancy which he here speedily assumed over all with whom he came into contact, and which especially signalised itself on the occasion of a disturbance, which he succeeded in quelling, between some Portuguese and Arab sailors, in the harbour of Mocha, recommended him to the Governor of Goa, and induced that Viceroy to offer him the command of a ship of war under the King of Portugal, —an appointment carrying with it several orders and titles. La Bourdonnais accepted the offer, and made an expedition to Mozambique, and several cruises in the Indian seas. But the situation of a foreigner in the service of another country can never be wholly satisfactory, and at the end of two years, La Bourdonnais found that the annoyances to which he was constantly subjected did not compensate for either the pleasure or profit of his command. He therefore threw it up and returned in 1733 to France. There he married, and, in 1735, he was appointed to succeed M. Dumas as Governor of the Isles of France and Bourbon.

Thither accordingly he proceeded. He found in Bourbon a fertile soil, and a community comparatively settled. He found the Isle of France, on the other hand, still covered

with almost impenetrable forests, and inhabited by a people almost naked, defenceless, and starving,—so devoid of energy, that they preferred discomfort and misery to the exercise even of that small amount of labour which in such a clime would have amply supplied their necessities.

On such a race, instruction and precept would have seemed alike thrown away. Yet La Bourdonnais resolved to attempt it. By his own personal teaching, by gently yet firmly impressing on the minds of these people the necessity under which they lay to work, and his determination that they should work, he succeeded in a short time in forming out of this unpromising raw material a civilized community. Under his influence, the Isle of France, which on account of its harbour he had made the seat of Government, assumed a new appearance. In place of the uncultivated waste of the interior, and the wretched hovels scattered along the coast, houses, magazines, barracks, fortifications, mills, quays, canals, and aqueducts, gradually made their appearance. The harbour was made fit for the reception of 35 or 40 ships, and supplied with docks and other appurtenances. Ships were built and launched, and in less than five years the two Islands gave proof that they had been administered in such a manner as to make them valuable to France,—fit, in fact, to be the commercial and refitting station between the East Indies and the mother country.

In 1740, the death of his wife rendered it necessary for La Bourdonnais to return to France. On his arrival there he found that complaints had preceded him. Cardinal Fleury was then Minister. An honest pains-taking economist, with little breadth of view, Fleury had but one principle of

external policy. This was the maintenance of peace,—especially of peace with England,—at any price. It was partly from a fear of giving umbrage to England, partly from his economic habits, that he starved the French Navy, neglected the Army, and gave no encouragement to commerce. Such a man could have little sympathy with a genius so fertile, an energy so buoyant, a desire to advance French interests so irrepressible as were bound together in the person of La Bourdonnais. When, therefore, some of those repressed speculators, and baffled ship-captains, whose gains and depredations had been lessened by the measures of La Bourdonnais, presented to the Minister and to the Directors of the Company a long list of their grievances, accompanied by insinuations common to their class, that La Bourdonnais was working mainly for his own interests, the narrow mind of the Cardinal did not repel the charges, and, worked upon at the same time by the Directors, he began to concert with them measures for his disgrace. It was the intimation of this, and the consequent desire to justify himself, that helped to bring La Bourdonnais from the scene of his labours.

Though narrow-minded to a degree, Fleury was an honest man. He received the great colonist with marked disfavour at the outset, but he did not remain long proof against the candour and frankness which characterised alike his demeanour and his statements. La Bourdonnais, in fact, insisted upon being informed of all that had been said against him, and, this done, he had little difficulty, not only in justifying his conduct, but in convincing the Minister and the Directors of the great value of the measures he had accomplished. The personal charges against him dissolved into air. He showed, in the course of his justification, that he had never possessed a foot of land in the

islands; that he had never traded for a single *livre;* and that so great had been the confidence of the colonists in his impartiality, that all the differences in the islands had been terminated by his arbitration, without recourse having been had, except in one solitary instance, to a lawsuit.

Released from the charges against him, and reinstated in the confidence of his masters, the fertile mind of La Bourdonnais began at once to resolve fresh schemes. At that time (1740-41), hostilities between France and England seemed imminent. The two nations had taken opposite sides in the war of the Austrian succession, and it was evident that not all the devices of Fleury would be able much longer to keep back a declaration of war. Under these circumstances, La Bourdonnais, foreseeing that that nation which, on the breaking out of the war, should have an overwhelming superiority of force to the other in the Indian seas, would be able to crush its rival, advised that he should be allowed to equip and fit out a squadron of six or eight ships as vessels of war. With these he proposed to sail to the Isle of France, there to await the breaking out of hostilities. On that event occurring, he would be able, he said, to intercept and capture the English merchantmen, and then, steering to India, would ruin the English settlements in that country.

This plan, practical, easy of execution, and, under an unfettered La Bourdonnais, certain of success, was nevertheless too grand in its grasp to commend itself to the timid and cautious policy of the Directors of the French India Company. These, therefore, declared against it at once. But Fleury, cautious as he was, had too much of the statesman in his composition, not to perceive the immense advantages that

might accrue from its successful operation. La Bourdonnais too was on the spot, and La Bourdonnais was careful to point out to him, amongst other arguments, that his consent to the plan did not commit him to any overt act of hostility against England; that the squadron would patiently await in the harbour of Port Louis the first declaration of war. Fleury, convinced by these and similar arguments, gave in to the plan, merely altering some of the details; the opposition of the Directors he for the time silenced.

The alteration in the details of the scheme, as originally proposed, consisted in the idea of substituting at least two ships of the French Navy for those which La Bourdonnais was to fit out. But, in France, in the reign of Louis XV, action seldom followed counsel. When the time came for the squadron to sail, the two King's ships, with which so much might have been effected, were diverted to some unimportant purpose, and La Bourdonnais found himself reduced to the command of five vessels belonging to the Company. But these would have been sufficient for his purpose, had he been allowed to pursue that purpose to its end. They carried a considerable armament, and they had on board 1,200 sailors and 500 soldiers. Yet even amongst these he had difficulties to contend with. But few of the sailors had ever been at sea, and the soldiers had been but little instructed in military exercises. With both these classes, La Bourdonnais pursued the course he had found so successful with the colonists of the Isle of France. He taught them what their duties were, and he set them himself the best example of doing them. To train them to the various labours likely to devolve upon them, was his constant and unremitting business on the voyage, and to such an extent did he succeed, that the ships which left France on the 5th of

April, 1741, manned by landsmen as sailors, and carrying recruits for soldiers, arrived at the Isle of France on the 14th August following, with crews as efficient as those which manned the King's Navy, and soldiers as well trained in all their musketry exercises as those who fought at Fontenoy.

It was the sad fate of those heroic men who struggled to establish a French empire in India, to find their chiefest and most redoubtable enemies in France itself. The genius of Clive, the persistent valour of Coote, and the almost forgotten gallantry of Forde, might have struggled in vain to overturn a settlement which was based on the solid foundations on which the early rulers of Pondichery had begun to build up a French India, had France herself been true to her struggling children. But the France of Louis XV more resembled the Medea of the ancient story than the tender and watchful mother. Often did she, 'with her own hands, immolate her offspring,' and, failing this, she treated the best and bravest of her sons rather as enemies to be thwarted, baffled, persecuted, and driven to despair, than as men who were devoting all their energies, the every thought of their lives, to increase her dominions. Yes, it was France who was their enemy;—not the France of Napoleon III, jealous of the fame, the rights, the privileges, the comforts, of the meanest of her children:—not the France of the Revolution and of the first Empire, ambitious of glory and of dominion,—but that France of the eighteenth century, which lay bound, and gagged, and speechless, untaught yet to give out even an inarticulate sound, at the feet of a man, who, shameless and conscienceless himself, cared little what might become of his subjects, provided only that he was

permitted to wallow perpetually in all the excesses of the vilest forms of debauchery.

And it was now that France betrayed her champion. She betrayed the man, who, but for the acts of the rulers of France, would have enjoyed the best opportunity of effectively establishing a French Empire in India, of rooting out every rival. La Bourdonnais had scarcely set sail, when those infamous intriguers and whisperers,—the certain hangers-on of corrupt Governments—began to uplift the voices which in his presence had remained mute. Amongst the Directors, the cry was raised that this expensive armament was useless for the purposes of France; that it was intended to minister to the ambition of its promoter. They declared that a policy of neutrality in the Indian seas was the only sound policy, and they expressed a conviction that, in case of war, the English would be glad to accede to such an arrangement. From the Directors the cry rose to the ministry. The weak Fleury, then nearly ninety years old, and no longer under the influence of the spell of La Bourdonnais' presence, after a short struggle, gave way to the clamour. In an evil hour for France and for French India, this dispenser under Louis XV of the fortunes of his country, transmitted orders to La Bourdonnais to send back his ships to France, 'even though they should have to sail without cargoes.'

Meanwhile, La Bourdonnais, unsuspicious of back-stairs influence, had, as we have seen, arrived at the Isle of France. The intelligence which awaited him there, was of a nature to stimulate all his energies. He received the news, which had some short time before arrived, of the danger which threatened Pondichery from the anticipated attack of the Mahrattas, and further that the authorities of the Islands,

obeying an urgent requisition from M. Dumas, then Governor of Pondichery, had despatched their garrisons to India. Impressed with the necessity of saving Pondichery at all costs, La Bourdonnais remained only a week at the Isle of France, and sailed then for Pondichery. Arriving there on the 30th September, he found that the tact and skill of M. Dumas had warded off the danger from that settlement, but that Mahé was still beleaguered. Thither, accordingly, to the scene of his early Indian triumphs, he sailed, and arriving there he speedily re-established French ascendancy. There being nothing more for him to accomplish in India, he returned to the Isle of France to carry out the scheme he had concerted with Fleury. It was on his return thither that he experienced the bitter pang which those alone can feel who, prompted in all their actions by noble and generous sentiments, find themselves restrained and held back by men of inferior, even of contemptible, powers. Then for the first time the order reached him to send back his ships to Europe. He knew the full significance of that order; he felt that it was to give up, for the coming war at all events, all hope of French preponderance in India; he felt that it would leave him a powerless spectator of the triumphs of the English,—disarmed and defenceless, perhaps even a prey to their attacks; he felt that it destroyed the hope of his life, the object of all his toil, the certain accomplishment, but for that, of his legitimate ambition. But what was he to do? The order was imperative. He must obey it. With a pang, the bitterness of which few men can have experienced, and which must have been enhanced afterwards by the prompt realisation of all his anticipations, he sent back the fleet. With it, however, he sent his own resignation, with an earnest prayer that he might be speedily relieved.

Why did he obey? Surely it was not his fault that he did obey. But what cruel destiny was it that was weighing down the fortunes of France? A few favouring gales, a swift sailing ship, an energetic Captain, and the fate of India might have been changed! Scarcely had the first keenness of the disappointment caused by the departure of the fleet been obliterated in the energetic action which now found a vent in the care of the colony, when there arrived at Port Louis a French ship conveying a despatch from the Minister of State, M. Orry, authorising La Bourdonnais to retain the fleet, and expressing a hope that he had disobeyed his previous instructions. Cardinal Fleury in fact was dying, Orry was virtual Minister, and taking in at once the great importance of La Bourdonnais' schemes, he had sent out this ship and these instructions. Too late, alas! for La Bourdonnais' hopes. The ships had gone, and there was no possibility of recalling them. Too well had he obeyed his Sovereign's order, for the obedience lost him an Empire.

Can we imagine,—some of us perhaps may,—the aggravation of disappointment which this message from the new Minister must have caused? How many it would have utterly crushed! How many it would have driven to despair! But La Bourdonnais was made of a very hard material. He was not proof against all the attacks of fortune, for he too, as we shall have occasion to describe, had his weak side, but this disappointment neither crushed him nor stopped his action. Learning a little later that the Minister and Directors refused to accept his resignation, he calmly resumed his duties as Governor of the islands, and began at once to make preparations for a possible future.

The French Ministry refused to accept the resignation of La Bourdonnais, but they did not immediately send back the ships. They informed him that he possessed all their confidence, and that it was to him they looked to take the Governor-Generalship of French India in case of any accident happening to Dupleix. Meanwhile Cardinal Fleury had died (29th January 1743), war had been declared between France and England, and La Bourdonnais saw with pain the great rivals of his nation reaping the field which he had sown to gather. An English fleet under Commodore Barnet had come to cruise in the Indian seas, and French merchantmen were picked up in every direction. La Bourdonnais could do nothing to hinder their depredations. As if to add to his perplexities, he, at this time, when utterly powerless himself, received a pressing message from Dupleix, the new Governor of French India, with whom he had been some time in correspondence, begging him to hasten with all the force at his disposal, to the defence of Pondichery.

Then was seen, in full perfection, an example of the truth of the maxim that great difficulties are nothing more than obstacles which a real man may overcome. It would seem impossible that this man, left destitute himself, should have been able to carry assistance to a countryman in distress. But no axiom is more true than this, that nothing is impossible to a brave man,—brave, I mean, not in the narrow view of personal courage, but in its widest and its broadest sense,—brave to bear the reproach, the obloquy, the hatred, the discontent of his fellow men;—brave to disregard the studied neglect, the insolent glance, the open attacks of men whom accident has placed higher than himself in the social scale;—brave, still, despite of all, to go on straight to the

end he has marked out to himself, despite of jeers and taunts, of open opposition, and secret calumny. It was in this sense that La Bourdonnais was brave, and being thus brave, he conquered the impossible.

What was the impossible? Without ships, without sailors, without an army, the Indian Ocean covered by hostile cruisers, with no resources but those which he had made in the colony, he was asked to embark an army, to traverse the Indian Ocean, to avoid or encounter the trained fleet of the enemy, and to relieve the beleaguered Capital of French India. Could he stamp upon the ground, and bring into existence the men, the guns, the material, the ships, that he had not? Did it not seem a very impossibility? Yet undeterred by this seeming, calmly, patiently, steadfastly, did La Bourdonnais set to work to accomplish the undertaking.

To succeed in such an attempt it was especially necessary to greatly dare; to throw to the winds all dread of responsibility; to use to the utmost extent the powers at his disposal. La Bourdonnais thus acted. Every ship that touched at Port Louis, likely to be suitable for his purpose, he detained. The objections of the Captains and of others interested in the vessels he silenced. It was unfortunate that, in addition to other difficulties, the islands, owing to an unwonted scarcity caused by a total failure of the crops, were unable to supply sufficient food for the crews; equally so, that a vessel, laden with provisions from Europe, had gone down at the very entrance of the harbour. Such was the scarcity, that the inhabitants of the islands were restricted by an order of the local Council to daily rations of one pound of bread or rice for every European and freeman, and a pound and a half of rice for each negro. The

necessary requirements for the equipment of the ships, carpenters, and smiths, and tailors to work upon them, sailors sufficient to man them, and soldiers to be conveyed by them, were alike wanting. But La Bourdonnais determined to make what he had not. He himself, carpenter, engineer, tailor, and smith, constructed with his own hands the model of all the articles that were required. Under his own personal superintendence, some men were trained to act as tailors, to cut out and prepare sails; others, as carpenters, busied themselves with gun-carriages, and fitted the vessels to receive them. Some were set to work to prepare materials for building ships, others to put together those materials. Then, again, the sailors were trained to work together, to serve the guns, to scale walls, to fire at a mark, to use the grappling hook. Finding their number insufficient, he recruited from the negroes, and formed the whole into mixed companies. Working in this way, he soon found himself at the head of a body of men, well taught and well disciplined, and ready to undertake any enterprise he might assign to them.

Nor was he less pains-taking and energetic regarding the supply of provisions. He had already detained and had begun to equip five vessels, including a vessel carrying twenty-six guns, which had brought him the pressing requisition from Dupleix, when he received intelligence from France that a squadron of five ships had started from L'Orient, and would be with him in October of that year (1745). The arrival of this squadron would cause a double strain upon his slender stock of provisions. He therefore arranged that so soon as a ship should be equipped, she should sail at once for the coast of Madagascar, and there lay in supplies of rice and other articles of food that might be procurable. In this way

he managed to over-ride that which otherwise would have been an unsurmountable difficulty.

The squadron promised in October 1745, arrived in January of the following year. It consisted of one ship of war of seventy guns, the *Achille*, and of four unarmed merchantmen. To arm and equip these latter, and to reconcile their officers to the displacement of their several cargoes, tasked all his resources. However, he succeeded. The armament consisted almost entirely of eight and twelve pounders, a calibre insignificant when compared with that of the guns ordinarily found, even in those days, on board a man-of-war. Even of these he had an insufficient number, and almost all his improvised fighting ships were pierced for a greater number of guns than they actually carried. However, one by one, partially equipped as they were, they left the island for the rendezvous at Madagascar. When all had taken their departure, he himself, brimful of bright hopes and enthusiasm, set sail to join them.

This was on the 24th March. Scarcely, however, had he sighted his squadron, when one of those tempests which periodically sweep over the Indian Ocean, burst upon him. His ships were driven from their anchoring ground, and for three days were tossed about by the storm. One of them foundered; the admiral's ship, the *Achille*, lost her three masts, and many of the others suffered equally. At last, however, they found a safe refuge in the Bay of Antongil, on the north-eastern coast of Madagascar. In this bay, lying off a desert island within it, the work of refitting was undertaken. Perhaps never was such a work begun under so many accumulated disadvantages. The island was marshy and insalubrious; the periodical rains had begun;

the ships had suffered fearfully, and their crews were knocked up by fatigue. There was no landing place; the forest whence wood was to be procured, was on the main land upwards of two miles distant; between it and the shore was a marsh three miles in circumference; a winding river with sufficient water to render the frequent crossing it wearisome, but not sufficient to float the logs down to the sea; and even when in the sea they were yet three miles from the shipping. But these difficulties, great as they were, were all overcome. He built a quay of the stone which the island produced, he erected workshops for the construction of masts, ropes, and other appliances; he threw a road across the marsh; he had the logs dragged along the bed of the river, and constructing rude canoes, he launched them at its mouth, and by their aid paddled the logs to the side of the disabled vessels. To choose these logs, he penetrated into the pestilential forests, in order that he might be sure that he had the advantage of the best species of wood procurable. His example stimulated the whole fleet. Those who, at first, had been inclined to show discontent, could not long resist his magic influence. But a short time elapsed before all worked with an energy of which before they had scarcely seemed capable. At the end of forty-eight days they had repaired every damage, though at a loss from climate and exposure, of ninety-five Europeans and thirty-three negroes. The fleet, however, was saved, and was once more ready to sail for the long wished for goal.

At length, on the 1st of June, it started. It consisted now of but nine ships. Besides the *Achille* of seventy guns, one vessel carried thirty-eight guns, one thirty-four guns, one thirty guns, one twenty-six, three twenty-four, and

one twenty guns. He had on board 3,342 men, of whom nearly one-fourth were Africans. Sailing with a fair wind, constantly exercising and encouraging his crews, La Bourdonnais arrived off Mahé at the end of the month. Here he learned that the English fleet had been last heard off Negapatam, below Karical; that though inferior in the number of ships, and slightly inferior in the number of crews, it was much superior in weight of metal, being armed with 24-pounders, and that it was waiting at Negapatam to intercept him. Summoning his Captains on board his ship, La Bourdonnais at once held a Council of war. He was resolved to fight, but he wished first to test the temper of his subordinates. To his delight he found in them an eagerness almost equal to his own, a desire to gain, if possible, the empire of India on the sea. His mind entirely at ease on this point, he altered his course, and a few days later arrived off Trincomalee.

It is time now that we should turn to the proceedings of the English fleet. At the outbreak of hostilities, the Nawab of the Carnatic, on the urgent requisition of Dupleix, had interdicted to the English any attack on the territorial possessions of the French in India. Commodore Barnet was therefore reduced to the necessity of confining his operations to sea. Taking up a position at Mergui, near the entrance of the Malacca Straits, he had employed himself industriously in intercepting French traders, and in effectively stopping French commerce. Hearing some rumours, in the early part of 1746, of the intended expedition of La Bourdonnais, he had returned to the Coromandel Coast, and anchored off Fort St. David. Here in the month of April he died, and the command of the squadron devolved upon Commodore Peyton.

This squadron consisted of one ship of sixty guns, three of fifty, one of forty, and one of twenty guns, six ships in all. But they carried mostly 24-pounders, and were armed with their full complement of guns. A judicious Commander would have been able, with such a force, to cause terrible destruction amongst the lightly armed vessels of La Bourdonnais.

Intelligence had been conveyed to Commodore Peyton of the appearance of a French fleet off Ceylon, and he was cruising off Negapatam to intercept it. Early on the morning of the 6th July it was descried. The discovery was made about the same time on board the French vessels, and the hostile squadrons began at once to manœuvre, the English to preserve the advantage of the wind, the French to gain it. La Bourdonnais, knowing his inferiority in weight of metal, and his superiority in men, had felt that his only chance of success lay in a hand to hand encounter, and his great object was to board. But the skill of Commodore Peyton, who divined his object, defeated this intention, and at half past four o'clock in the afternoon, that officer had gained a position which enabled him to open fire at a safe distance on the French.

This distance was all in favour of the English. With their 24-pounders they inflicted great damage amongst the French ships, which these latter, with their 8 and 12-pounders and musketry, were very partially able to repay. Three of their ships were disabled at the beginning of the action,—one indeed completely dismasted,—and had not La Bourdonnais, coming up with the *Achille*, the only ship of his squadron that carried its proper complement of heavy guns, drawn upon himself for half an hour the whole fire of the English, the squadron could

not have escaped defeat. As it was, night separated the combatants before a decisive advantage had been gained on either side.

Day broke, showing the French squadron formed in line, the advantage of the wind still being, as on the previous day, with the English. It rested with the latter, therefore, whether the contest should be renewed. There were very many weighty reasons in favour of prompt and vigorous action. The English had had but sixty men killed and wounded the previous day, and one only of their ships had received any considerable damage from the enemy's fire; they were all ships of war; eight of the French ships were but imperfectly and lightly armed; the English fleet had been stationed off Negapatam to obstruct the advance of the French fleet; to abandon the field, therefore, was to leave Madras a prey to the enemy.

But in 1746, the English were not accustomed to regard the empire of the seas as their own. Some of those on board that squadron might easily have recollected the time when, after the battle off Beachy Head, on the 30th June 1690, the English channel had been scoured for weeks, unopposed, by the victorious fleet of de Tourville,—the English fleet having sought refuge in the Thames. Certain it is, that Commodore Peyton acted as English Commodores of the time of the revolutionary war never would have thought of acting. Because one of his ships was leaky, he deemed the attack too hazardous to be made. A Council of war having confirmed this view, he made sail to the south, bound for Trincomalee, leaving the way open to Pondichery—deserting that Madras which he had been sent to protect.

If La Bourdonnais was relieved by the departure of his enemy, he did not show it. On the contrary, he made an

appearance of pursuing the English. But it was only an appearance. He must, in reality, have been greatly relieved by their sheering off. He had expended a great portion of his ammunition, and he had provisions but for twenty-four hours longer. The disappearance of the English left him free to accomplish his object. His dismasted ship, the *Insulaire*, he ordered to Bengal to be repaired; then quickly collecting the remainder of his squadron, he resumed almost immediately his northerly course, and on the following evening cast anchor in the Pondichery roads.

One portion of his seemingly impossible task had thus been accomplished. Pondichery was safe, the French fleet mistress of the Indian seas, Madras uncovered. The positions of the contending rivals had been exactly reversed. It would now be for the French to threaten, for the English to sue for neutrality. What will be the result? Will the Nawab of the Carnatic, standing neutral between the contending parties, extend to the English the same protection he had accorded to their rivals? If not, it would seem as though their case were almost desperate. Abandoned by their fleet, with but three hundred Europeans within its walls, Madras presented far fewer means of defence than Pondichery. Its Governor, too, Mr. Nicholas Morse, was neither a Dumas nor a Dupleix. On the other hand, the French had at their head two masters, both men of genius, of energy, of ambition; the one a master in council, an adept at state-craft, skilled in all the wiles of a subtle policy, but himself unacquainted with war and its details: the other, a man great in action and prompt in council, accustomed to command, accustomed to see his will obeyed, to bear down every obstacle; but whether equally fitted to carry out the will of another, as yet unproved. The

uncertainty in this respect formed the only cloud in the horizon in the fortunes of French India. Will the active genius, who has 'conquered the impossible,' who, by the sheer force of his will, has created the soldiers and the sailors, the ships and the guns, wherewith he has relieved Pondichery, will he now subordinate that will to the will of another man, his superior in position, but whom he has as yet only heard of as a successful trader? Up to the moment of casting anchor at Pondichery, not a shadow of a contest had arisen. Hitherto each had acted independently of the other. The communications between the two Governors had been most friendly. 'The honour of success,' wrote Dupleix in the early part of the year, 'will be yours, and I shall hold myself lucky in contri-'buting thereto through means that owe their value entirely 'to your skill.' 'We ought,' wrote La Bourdonnais on his side, 'to regard one another as equally interested in the pro-'gress of events, and to work in concert. For my part, Sir, I 'devote myself to you beforehand, and I swear to you a 'perfect confidence.' But circumstances had altered. Success had now been attained; the two men were about for the first time to come in contact. Which of them was to take the lead? It was in the chance of some disagreement between those strong natures, both accustomed to command, that lay the best chance for Governor Morse and Madras.

In the correspondence which had hitherto taken place between La Bourdonnais and the Governor of Pondichery, the destruction of the English fleet and the capture of Madras had been dwelt upon by both as the two great objects of the expedition. To carry out these projects each had pledged himself to the other. Yet La Bourdonnais had not been many days at Pondichery before it became evident that a

very considerable difference of opinion existed between himself and Dupleix as to the manner in which those objects should be attained. The events of the last few months had convinced Dupleix that, so long as peace between the European settlements in India depended upon the conditions of peace or war in Europe, so long would the safety of Pondichery be threatened. It was therefore his earnest wish to take the fullest advantage of the opportunity which now so happily offered, and by the destruction first of Madras and afterwards of Fort St. David, to root out the English from the Coromandel Coast. Very soon, therefore, after the arrival of La Bourdonnais, he began to press upon him the advantage of prompt and quick action, so as to obtain possession of Madras before the English Commodore should have recovered from his panic, or should have been reinforced from home.

From what we have seen of the previous career of La Bourdonnais, it would be imagined that of all men then living, he probably least required to be urged to promptitude of action. Yet those who, in the course of their lives, have noted the extreme repugnance with which men of action, accustomed to command,—to plan as well as to execute,—submit to superior authority, will scarcely be surprised at the sudden transformation which seemed to take possession of his nature. The first irritation which appears to have rankled in his bosom, was caused by the refusal of Dupleix to dismantle the fortifications of Pondichery to supply him with guns of the precise calibre which he demanded. He had asked for forty-four 18, and for fourteen 12-pounders. He states in his memoirs simply that he was refused, and this version has been adopted by the English historians. But so far from this being the case, Dupleix instead of forty-four 18 and fourteen

12-pounders, or 58 guns in all, sent him sixty-two; twenty-eight 18, twelve 12, and twenty-two 8-pounders, and exchanged the others that were slightly damaged. He at the same time fully and clearly explained why he was unable to make the supply correspond exactly to the demand.

Having thus furnished him with guns, and, in addition, with ammunition, supplies, and soldiers, Dupleix impressed upon La Bourdonnais the expediency of either sailing to attack the English fleet, or making a move against Madras. But La Bourdonnais showed an indisposition to do either. 'The English fleet,' he said, 'outsailed him, and it would be dangerous to attack Madras so long as the English fleet was unsubdued.' He proposed, instead, to attack Fort St. David, twelve miles below Pondichery,—a proceeding which, he thought, might draw the English to its defence. Against this plan Dupleix strongly protested. "Fort St. David," he wrote, "is not worth the powder and shot you will expend upon it." He pointed out that even its capture at that stage would be unfortunate, inasmuch as it would induce the Nawab of the Carnatic to take part with the English, and would thus save Madras. 'The expedition against that place,' he added, 'is the only one which can indemnify us, and do honour to the French nation in India.' He continued to urge upon La Bourdonnais, in a lengthened argument, that two principal objects had brought him to India—the desire to destroy the English squadron, and the hope of taking Madras, and that abandoning one of these, he ought to attach himself firmly to the other.

The day after this correspondence, La Bourdonnais, who with many of his sailors had been suffering, in consequence,

he asserted, of the bad water supplied him at Pondichery,—it forms one of his grievances against Dupleix,—took advantage of a favourable breeze, and went in search of the English fleet. He found them off Negapatam, but though he hoisted Dutch colours as a decoy, they fled before him, he says, in a manner that soon took them out of sight. He manœuvred to get near them for three days, but failing, he returned to Pondichery.

The escape of the English fleet seems to have had an extraordinary effect on the mind of La Bourdonnais. He who at the head of nine Company's ships had traversed the Indian Ocean, and had encountered and beaten off an English fleet, now wrote to Dupleix to say that there was this difference between the ships of the King and the ships of the Company,—that with the former one fought for glory, with the latter, only for profit. He added that his squadron was insufficient for the double task of keeping off the English fleet and attacking Madras, and he appealed to the Council for their advice.

The Superior Council lost not a moment. The very same day they wrote to La Bourdonnais, and, after recapitulating the preparations that had been made, the expenses that had been incurred, and the time that had been lost, they placed before him the choice of two alternatives: 'Either,' they said, 'go to Madras and attack it, or go and drive the English fleet from these seas. At present they are intercepting all the vessels coming from Europe, whilst you are wasting time here.'

But even this letter failed to move La Bourdonnais. He publicly declared that its contents prevented him from all action, inasmuch as they did not prescribe precisely which

of the two courses he was to adopt.[1] This proceeding coming to the knowledge of the Council, they again met, and ordered a citation to be served upon La Bourdonnais to adopt one or other of the plans which had been presented to him. On receiving this, La Bourdonnais issued orders for the fleet to leave Pondichery that same evening. He was himself too unwell to go with it, but on the fleet returning from its cruise, with two prizes it had taken, he embarked on the 12th September to proceed on his long meditated enterprise.

Once again at sea, and master of his own actions, La Bourdonnais resumed his bold, daring, energetic nature. On midday of the 15th September he came within cannon-shot of Madras, and landing 1,100 Europeans, 400 Sepoys, and 400 Africans, commenced his attack upon the place. The Madras garrison consisted of only 300 men, of whom 34 were Portuguese vagabonds, and only 200 soldiers fit for duty. Despondency and mistrust reigned within its walls. The defence was therefore of the feeblest character. On the 20th they sent two deputies to negotiate for a surrender, and on the 21st the Lilies of France floated over the ramparts of Fort St. George.

So long as the operations of La Bourdonnais had been of an active nature, he had remained true to his manly nature. There, he was really and confessedly master. No one in that armament questioned his authority. But the moment he dropped the character of warrior and assumed that of negotiator, he became at once under the orders of the Governor General of French India. Except in entire subordination to him, he had no powers at all to treat. No one knew this better than himself. Yet he chafed at the very thought of

it. He could not endure the idea that he was not here, as he had been on board his fleet, as he had been in the Isle of France, absolute master, and, unfortunately for himself, unfortunately for his country, he allowed this idea to influence all his actions in the negotiations that followed. The terms of the surrender were very simple. It was agreed that the English found within the limits of Madras should constitute themselves prisoners of war; that the town and fort should be immediately given up; and that it should be reserved for further negotiations on what terms Madras might be ransomed. No positive contract, however, was entered into that it should be ransomed. La Bourdonnais wrote on the subject to Dupleix: "The terms on which the town surrendered have put it, so to say, at my discretion. There is a kind of capitulation, however, of which I enclose a copy, and which, as you perceive, but tends to authorise my right of deciding on the fate of the town." As for Governor Morse, so little was he master of his senses, that he even forgot to demand a copy of the capitulation.

Dupleix, on his part, to induce the Nawab of the Carnatic to consent to his attack upon Madras, had promised to make it over to him after its capture. On the 21st September, therefore, when the success of the scheme was no longer doubtful, he wrote to La Bourdonnais, instructing him to listen "to no proposal which might be made for ransom, as this would be to deceive the Nawab, and make him join our enemies."

The receipt of these instructions seems to have goaded La Bourdonnais into defying them, and, unfortunately, he had a plausible excuse to fall back upon. In the instructions he had received from France in 1741, for his first and fruitless

expedition, was one which forbad him to retain any place conquered from the English on the Indian Coast. He might destroy, but not retain. It would be easy, had I time, to show that this prohibition was intended for a far different order of things than were then existing. That it was so, is admitted even by the latest Editor of Mr. Mill's history; but La Bourdonnais, piqued by the message of Dupleix, at once brought it into requisition, and two days later, agreed to restore Madras to the English for a ransom.

Then ensued between the two men a contest injurious to the country to which they belonged, deadly to the fortunes of one of them. Dupleix refused to ratify a convention which would be fatal to the policy on which he had embarked,—which might be even dangerous to Pondichery. In vain did La Bourdonnais storm and threaten, and talk of blighted honour and broken faith. Dupleix from first to last refused to ratify the arrangement he proposed regarding the limitation of the French occupancy of Madras. Other points he conceded, but on this he was firm. To such an extent, however, did La Bourdonnais persist, that although he had previously resolved to proceed at the end of September to Acheen, in Sumatra, and awaiting there, in company with the three fresh ships that had arrived at Pondichery, the return of the spring, then to attempt other enterprises, he continued, even after the monsoon had set in, to dally in the Madras roads.

Bitterly did he suffer for his imprudence. On the 24th October there came on one of those hurricanes for which that month is famous. The effect on the fleet was most disastrous. Two ships foundered with all their crews and several soldiers on board. Many were utterly disabled; all more or less injured. Its existence as a fleet was at an end.

The La Bourdonnais of the Isle of France would have triumphed over even a greater calamity than this, but the La Bourdonnais of Madras was the slave of his unrestrainable passion. Hastily announcing to Dupleix his determination to depart, and ratifying, as with the authority of the Superior Council,—which he had not,—the treaty with the English, he made over Madras to M. Desprémenil, and sailed with three of his disabled ships to Pondichery. Here he stayed only five days, then taking with him the three fresh ships and another, he made for the roadstead of Acheen. Unable, however, to make it, he left the four sound ships to continue their course, and giving up all thoughts of further triumphs over the English, bore up with the remainder for the Isle of France. Here he arrived in the beginning of December.

In this manner, after a short sojourn of four months, did La Bourdonnais leave those latitudes, to gain which had been the dream of his heart during the best years of his life. Yet in those four months what stirring events had been concentrated! Arriving in the Indian seas with a fleet he had, for all the purposes of the expedition, made himself, with crews he had trained, and soldiers whom he had taught and drilled, he first encountered and beat off an English fleet, far superior in weight of metal; then, re-fitting and re-arming at Pondichery, he went out and drove off the English squadron, and having thus obtained the mastery of the seas, he sailed boldly to attack the stronghold of the English on the Coast of Coromandel. Taking it without the loss of a man, he heard, very soon afterwards, of the arrival of a reinforcement of three ships of war at Pondichery. What a position did that give him! Conqueror of Madras, master of the ocean, with no one to oppose his onward progress, he might have

sailed up the Hooghly, have conquered Calcutta, and have destroyed English commerce in the Indian seas. In acting thus he would have fulfilled the very purpose of his mission; he would have carried out his most cherished dreams. Why then, it may be asked, did he not effect this? The answer is simple. It was because, though he had triumphed over difficulties such as would have baffled most men, though he had conquered enemies on shore and driven off every rival from the sea, he had not overcome himself. He was not content with being conqueror,—he would be autocrat and master as well. He could not bend his spirit,—that spirit which had bent so many to itself,—to obey the will of another. So far did this influence finally master him, this determination to be 'all or nothing,' that, finding, after a struggle which must have tried him to the very core, that the inflexible will of Dupleix prevented his being the first, he deliberately made up his mind to be 'nothing,' and so left India.

And yet it is not France that has the right to pronounce upon him a severe judgment. Left by France to himself, he had civilized for her one great island in the Indian ocean, and, making resources for himself, had done what none other of her sons has ever succeeeded in doing,—he had subdued the chief Indian settlement of her great rival. The thought of the struggles for supreme power with Dupleix may well be obliterated by the memory of that great triumph,—by the recollection of the unsurpassed energy, daring, and strength of will, by which alone it could have been achieved!

He has now,—at the epoch of which I am speaking,—gazed for the last time on the scene of his triumphs. No more will he be called upon to strike a blow for French

India. Arriving in the Isle of France, as I have said, in the beginning of December, he found a successor, M. David, installed there, with orders to leave to La Bourdonnais the command of the fleet, only in case he found the accounts of his government in proper order.

M. David having pronounced favourably in this respect, La Bourdonnais was placed in command of the squadron, and directed to proceed to France, taking Martinique on the way. A storm scattered his ships off the Cape of Good Hope, but he succeeded, with four of them, in gaining Martinique. Here he learned that the homeward route was barred by English cruisers, whom it would be impossible to avoid, and who were too numerous to contend against. Impatient, however, to arrive in France to justify himself, he proceeded under a feigned name to St. Eustache, and took a passage in a Dutch ship. War, however, had been declared between England and Holland, and the Dutch vessel was taken, and carried into an English port. Here La Bourdonnais was recognised, and was at once constituted prisoner of war.

His reception in London, whither he was taken, was, however, most flattering to him. He was at once allowed his freedom and permission to return to France, on parole, and he was treated by the Royal family, the Directors of the East India Company, and others, with the greatest distinction. Hearing, however, that the Government and the Directors were incensed against him, he resolved to proceed without delay to France.

La Bourdonnais left London on the 22nd February 1748, and in a few days found himself at Versailles. Here, however, a very different reception awaited him. Louis XV,

king of France, in the very height of his sensual career, had no thought but for the gratification of his palled and jaded appetites. The reigning favourite, Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, Madame d'Etioles, the supposed daughter of a clerk in a mercantile house, created by the King Marquise de Pompadour, held in her hands the whole direction of affairs. Such was the destiny of the France of Louis XV, that the fate of her armies, the fame and fortune of her generals and admirals, the prosperity of her citizens, depended on the absolute voice of one shameless woman. Caring only for power, she maintained her influence over the king by ministering, by means of others, to his debaucheries, whilst he signed the decrees that she had ordered to be prepared. The ministers were her creatures. Orry, whom she had disgraced, and who had died the previous year, had been succeeded by Machault, a man of little experience, as Controller General of Finances, whilst the chief directorship of the Navy had been conferred upon Le Normand de Tournehem, a subordinate in the Revenue Department, and the reputed father of the favourite.

Under such a régime, justice was not even thought of. It being the object of Madame de Pompadour to consolidate her own power, she cared only for those whose wealth and influence could be useful to her. In her hatred she was vindictive and remorseless. Many a man expiated a trifling wound to her vanity or a thoughtless sarcasm on her position, by a life of imprisonment in the Bastille. She possessed a cold and callous heart, utterly incapable of sympathy or feeling. The selfish and animal nature of the King she knew thoroughly, and she managed him with an art that brought him quite under her control. Not that he loved her. Love was a feel-

ing of which Louis XV was incapable. Cold-blooded, indeed, must have been the man who, as the remains of the woman with whom and under whose influence he had lived for nineteen years, were being carried in a drizzling rain to the grave, could jocularly remark—"The marchioness has bad weather for her journey." Yet over that cold selfish nature she possessed complete mastery. Though he was often aware, and disapproved of, the tendency of her projects, he never had sufficient energy even to remonstrate against them. She provided him with debauchery in the *Parc aux Cerfs*, and he left to her unlimited and unfettered action.

Such were the rulers of the France to which La Bourdonnais returned, proposing first, to clear his character, and secondly, to suggest new operations for the extension of French territory. But he returned to a France which was not even the France of Fleury, nerveless and palsied as he had considered that to be. The France of 1748 used the spasmodic vitality she possessed chiefly against her own children. La Bourdonnais arrived to find himself the object of accusations which had not the semblance of a truth,—accusations which the office-holders who registered the decrees of Madame de Pompadour regarded as fully proved by the fact that they had been preferred. This man, who had devoted all his years to France, who, by his own power of will and energy, had begun for her the conquest of English India, and whose fault in one particular would have been appropriately punished by admonition or recall, found himself accused of having disregarded the King's orders, injured the Company's interests, betrayed the State, and sold Madras to the English. No explanation was listened to, or rather all means of explanation were denied to him. He was thrown into the Bastille.

Permission to see his wife and children was denied him. Paper and ink were withheld from him, and this great soldier, whose active spirit had found the outer world not too wide for its conceptions, was shut up for three years in a narrow cell, whilst the charges against him were examined, according to the tedious forms of the period, before a Commission. But the spirit of La Bourdonnais could not be idle even in a prison. He devised means to write his memoirs. Handkerchiefs steeped in rice-water served him for paper, coffee dregs for ink, and he made a pen out of a piece of copper money, which he flattened out, rolled up, and pointed. At the end of three years, the Commission solemnly declared his innocence, and the gates of the Bastille were opened to him. But it was then too late. Paralysis of one side had resulted from his long confinement, and his general health had been undermined. His affairs, too, compulsorily neglected, were in a state of disorder. Indignation at such a reward for his many services, increased the malady which confinement had induced. It had, in fact, broken his heart. His release, therefore, brought him but little benefit. A few months later, the 9th September 1753, he died, the first Franco-Indian victim,—the first out of others who were to follow,—to the misgovernment of Louis XV.

Thus did France, like Medea, with her own hands, immolate her offspring. While we lament the sad fate of one who had done so much, who was capable of doing so much more, for his country, let us mark the results of a policy so insensate, so suicidal! It is not every year, it is not even every quarter of a century, that a La Bourdonnais is born. When they do appear,—these men full of daring and genius, of activity of mind and body,—a wise Government gives

them a field for the display of the great gifts with which they have been endowed. The errors of Genius,—and Genius, being human, does commit errors,—are, by such a Government, lightly visited and easily condoned. If France had thus acted, we may speculate as to what might have been the fate of Hindostan, what the effect even on the history of the world. But pursuing an opposite course, she lost her well-founded hold on the Continent of India, lost consideration in the Councils of Europe. The struggling men of genius whom the France of Loius XV reared and trained, found a more formidable enemy in the Chateau of Versailles than on all the battle-fields of India.

I shall trespass upon your indulgence but for a few minutes longer. It is impossible for me, however, to quit a career so eventful without placing before you, in a few brief sentences, the impression which a contemplation of it has fixed upon my mind.

The earlier career of La Bourdonnais, from the time of his enlistment as a common sailor at ten years of age, to the period when he relieved Pondichery in 1746, presents one of the most remarkable examples which History offers, of the immense results which untiring industry, great force of character, and an energy that was absolutely dauntless, are able to achieve. These qualities are better than Genius. United with one other quality,—the power of mastering the passions,—they are irresistible; there is no position to which they may not legitimately aspire. It was by the possession of the first three of these, he being at the time virtually absolute ruler, that La Bourdonnais was able to accomplish those great results which even to us would appear incredible, did we not know them to be true.

But in the second portion of his career,—the short four months that elapsed between his arrival at Pondichery and his return to the islands,—he afforded a striking example, how vain are the greatest endowments, how useless, how worse than useless, the most splendid talents, when unaccompanied by that mastery over the passions, that power of disciplining the spirit, to which I have before alluded. Not indeed,—God forbid that I should breathe the suggestion, much less harbour the thought,—that any man ought to lower his standard of what is morally right, ought to permit his opinions to be influenced, by contact with a superior, merely because he is a superior. The man who would feel within himself a sense of moral inferiority when brought into contact with his fellow-man, however exalted his rank, or who would stoop to adapt his views to advance his own interest, is,—to use the expressive language of King David,—"a worm and no man, the very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people." But the right of a man to his own opinion is very different from the moral necessity which devolves upon every one, from highest to lowest, to submit himself to lawfully constituted authority, to obey, not only without repining, but with alacrity, the orders of his superior, even though he may disapprove of them. It was when La Bourdonnais, brought for the first time, after the exercise by himself for more than ten years of almost absolute power, into contact with authority superior to his own, chafed against his position, struggled to be first, and to succeed in that struggle, sacrificed the object of his life,—it was then that he gave an example, by its absence in his case, of the value of that restraining power,—of the utter uselessness of other qualities without it. A few days ago I was expressing

to a lady my wonder that the French, with the marvellous opportunities they enjoyed, with the great men they had on the spot, should have yet failed in all their efforts to found an empire in India. The quick perceptive powers, so eminently characteristic of woman, at once detected one of the reasons. "Was it not partly," she said, "because the French leaders "sacrificed everything to their love of personal distinction "and aggrandisement, whilst the English, keeping steadily "to the slower path of duty and subordination, were thus "able to produce a combination of efforts all working to one "point,—the carrying out the policy of the Governor, who-"ever he might be." Who can say that this is not the true solution?

But a lesson, scarcely less instructive, is to be learned from the last three years of La Bourdonnais' career. What is the first impression regarding him, that now, more than a hundred years after his demise, rises into our minds at the very mention of his name? Do we not at once think far more of the infamy of the crowned sensualist of France, in allowing such a man to languish for three years in prison, to come out only to die, than of the shortcomings of one who had done so much for his country? Do we not feel a conviction that nothing short of a Revolution,—a Revolution thorough and unsparing,—could have cleansed that vile Court of its vile impurities, could have swept away the corruptions which had been accumulating for fifty-nine years? Can we think of La Bourdonnais dying of a broken heart; Dupleix in wretchedness, privation, and misery; Lally, gagged, on the scaffold, under the orders or with the connivance of the King whom they had served, and feel one spark of sympathy for that effete race which so long degraded France, and which France

so justly expelled? We have at least this consolation,—and to a well balanced mind it is no small one,—that posterity exercises even justice on the oppressor and the oppressed. There lives not a man who would stand up and declare that he would rather have lived the shameless life of Louis XV, and bear his eternal infamy, than have endured the gag of Lally, the dying agonies of Dupleix, the broken heart of La Bourdonnais, and enjoy their imperishable fame.

O T Cutter, Military Orphan Press,—1865